



Chefs and apprentices fill the kitchen with action at the Senior Chef of the Year competition  
Photo by: Mike Strasser

### ***Kitchen commandos***

## ***Team Europe takes second place Installation of the Year honors at Culinary Arts Competition***

**HANAU, Germany** - Soldier chefs from Europe braised, roasted and sautéed their way to a second-place team finish at the 2007 Culinary Arts Competition at Fort Lee, Va., March 5-16.

Team Europe finished second in the Installation of the Year category. Individual winners included Spc. Leia Hetter, 5th Quartermaster Company, winning Best in Class — Contemporary Pastry, and Sgt. 1st Class Eric Jenkins, 29th Support Group, and Pfc. Garrett Andrews winning the Best Two Member Team in the Nutritional Hot Food Challenge.

The competition is rated the largest culinary competition in America, according to Maj. David Allen, director of the Army Center of Excellence, Subsistence. Seventeen teams and more than 150 food

service professionals from the Army, Marines and Coast Guard competed.

Three U.S. Army Garrison Hessen Soldiers competed for Team Europe: Spc. Rodriquez Bracey, 123rd Main Support Battalion, Dexheim; Pfc. Kristian Clay, Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 1st Armored Division, Wiesbaden; and Spc. Welton Wilson, 1st Battalion, 35th Armor, 1st AD, Baumholder.

“It was a great opportunity to be there; to experience cooks from all over the world and get guidance from the international judges,” said Bracey, who earned silver medals in the Team Table and Field Cooking categories.

### **Surprised at success**

Bracey said he felt fantastic about earning the second-place Installation of the Year honor. “It came as a shock. We were getting graded real hard by the judges. Many times we thought we would score higher than we did. We didn’t know if we could pull it off.” Although tough, the judges were extremely helpful, according to Bracey. “The judges make you see that there are areas where you can do better,” he said. “For example, when I did my Willy Wonka sculpture for the team table — they said it was good, but they also told me where I could do better to get the next higher medal. They pointed out the sculpture needed to be more realistic — there should be wrinkles in the sleeve of the jacket; that in real life you see a shirt cuff sticking out of the jacket sleeve and that’s what you should see in the sculpture.

“If you didn’t know something they would give you guidance. They would do whatever they could without compromising the competition,” said Bracey.

The Mount Olive, N.C., native also earned a bronze medal in the Junior Chef of the Year contest. The competition pitted 14 junior food specialists against one another. “It was very intense,” said Bracey. “I had been practicing for several weeks with different



mystery baskets. So when I went into the competition I was somewhat prepared.”

The chefs were required to prepare a three-course meal using secret ingredients revealed to them as the timed contest began, said Bracey. “You have to use everything in the mystery basket, plus you can use other common pantry items. You make a three-course meal: an appetizer, soup or salad, a main course and a dessert. I had four hours to prep and cook, and 30 minutes to serve the judges.”

“I made a seafood and wilted spinach salad; pistachio crusted, stuffed chicken (stuffed with chicken and habanera peppers) served with asparagus tips and tournee potatoes. My dessert was a strawberry-kiwi soufflé.

A tournee potato is cut with seven smooth, curved sides, said Bracey. “It’s one of the toughest cuts you can do,” he said The precise preparation demonstrates the level of knife skills a chef possesses.

### **A learning experience**

“It was a great learning experience,” said Clay of the competition. “It makes me appreciate my job even more because it showed me I can be a chef and a Soldier.”

Clay and Wilson competed for Team Europe in the Student Team Skills Competition. Clay said the four-person team had to prepare a four-course meal in 75 minutes. “We planned the menu weeks ahead of the competition. I prepared the dessert. I made a molten lava cake with pistachio, sage, carrot and caramel ice cream and macerated berries.” Wilson was responsible for a tomato basil soup with spaetzle.

He also assisted Bracey in the junior chef contest. “I was his apprentice. I had to get his ingredients, make sure everything was clean, do his rough chops, made sure his hot plates were hot and cold plates were cold.”



Dexheim’s SPC. Rodriguez-Bracey heats things up during the Junior Chef of the Year competition.

Photo by: T. Anthony Bell



**New to the kitchen**

Wilson credits his success to the culinary workshop held at Hanau in December. “I’d never been in a kitchen cooking like that,” said Wilson, explaining that upon reaching Baumholder, his first duty assignment, he deployed to Iraq. “We didn’t cook there,” he said. “We provided security.”

Despite being green in the kitchen, Wilson, who redeployed in November, proved to be a fast learner at the Hanau workshop.

“We had a week to train and a week to prepare our own meal. I took what I had learned and did my own thing with it. There were 30-40 people at the workshop and they picked 13 for the team. I was one of those 13.”

The three Soldiers are now back at their dining facilities, but that’s just fine with them. “You get picked to do these kinds of things because they know you’ll come back and share the knowledge. It’s a privilege, but you’ve got to come back and make the mission happen,” said Bracey.

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*(Some information for this article courtesy of Fort Lee Public Affairs)*



SPC. Leia Heeter contributed this delicacy to Team Europe’s Willy Wonka display for judging.  
Photo by: Mike Strasser